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# Strategy to delay base closings is alive in the Senate

Friday, May 27, 2005

BY J. SCOTT ORR STAR-LEDGER WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON -- A day after the House soundly defeated a proposal to delay the military base closing process, a group of lawmakers yesterday backed a similar long-shot legislative strategy in the Senate.

The measure, sponsored by Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) and backed by Sen. Jon Corzine (D-N.J.), would delay the current round of base closures until the Pentagon completes a report on future military needs and the majority of troops stationed in Iraq have returned.

"We shouldn't be closing a single base while America is at war," Thune said during a morning Capitol Hill news conference. "Rushing this process could have great consequences."

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is reviewing a list of dozens of bases the Pentagon proposed for closure two weeks ago. Among the major bases slated to be closed is Fort Monmouth.

"Our soldiers right now are fighting the war in Iraq and we have soldiers in dangerous territory guarding the fragile democracy in Afghanistan," Corzine said. "We should not close bases that develop the technology to keep our troops safe and help maintain their superiority on the battlefield."

Meanwhile yesterday, the House accepted an amendment to a military spending bill that would prohibit the Pentagon from spending any money to actually close the bases until it releases information it used to determine which installations should be shut. The Pentagon has said it will release the data.

"In order to have a conscientious evaluation of what is being proposed here, we need the data. It's as simple as that," said Rep. Rush Holt (D-12th Dist.), whose district includes Fort Monmouth.

At the same time, the House defeated by a single vote an amendment to a spending bill for the Department of Veterans Affairs that would have taken

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\$169 million from the \$1.6 billion base closing budget to pay for benefits for the families of troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Lawmakers from states hard hit by the BRAC process, like New Jersey, Connecticut, South Dakota and Maine, have been scrambling to find ways to save their bases. Lawmakers from states that don't lose bases, or that gain new missions, have shown little interest in hindering the process.

On Wednesday, the House defeated an amendment to a defense authorization bill that would have delayed the process.

Sponsored by Rep. Jeb Bradley (R-N.H.), the amendment was defeated, 112-316. The administration said the bill would be vetoed if Bradley's amendment was accepted.

Staff writer Wayne Woolley contributed to this report.

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